

Hanscom's trivia buff earns spot on stage with Trebek

by MSgt. Daryl Mayer, Electronic Systems Center Public Affairs

HANSCOM AFB, Mass. (AFMCNS) --- Answer: The opportunity to win thousands of dollars on the grand daddy of all trivia game shows.

Question: What is an appearance on Jeopardy?

At least that is the question 1st Lt. Michael Currie, whose appearance on the nationally syndicated show aired Jan. 1, would pose to that answer.

The Phoenixville, Penn., native and self-described trivia buff had long wanted to be on the show. He sent in the requisite postcard a few times but had never received any word back. And when the call finally did come, it was a bit of a surprise.

After hearing that Jeopardy's producers were holding tryouts in the Boston area, Currie's parents took the liberty of sending in a card on his behalf.

"I didn't even know until I got a call telling me to go to the Hynes Convention Center for a tryout," he said.

The first hurdle Currie and the 40 others invited for the tryout faced was a 50-question exam.

"If you got a certain number right on the test then you stay for a mock round, so they can judge how well you would play and also how you look on television," said Currie.

After the mock round, the show's staff took a photo, a short biography and sent the lieutenant home to wait for the "call."

Rather than sitting by the phone, Currie went back to work building models to support the Airborne Laser for the Atmospheric Turbulence Group of the Air Force Research Laboratory. Three months later, he received word.

"The said we'll tape your show in three weeks," he was told. "I immediately started an intensive cram session, world capitals, things like that."

In addition to brushing up, he had to find a way to get to Los Angeles, where the show is tape. Contestants have to pay their own way to the taping, and luckily Currie was able to find cheap tickets and some friends willing to house him and his wife during their stay. Finally on Halloween, the big day came.

"I was fairly anxious," he recalled. "You sit in a room with all the people you will go against. Everyone was making polite conversation while all along there was this uneasy feeling because you knew soon you would be trying to beat them."



WHO IS 1st LT. MICHAEL CURRIE - Making his Jeopardy debut, Currie is pictured here alongside the game show's host, Alex Trebek. Currie builds models to support the Airborne Laser.

The green room, as it is called, wasn't something Currie had to experience for long as he was scheduled for the first taping of the day.

Walking onto the set of a show he had watched so many times had a surreal feel to it, he remembered. "But when the doors burst open and [host] Alex [Trebek] ran out, I knew it was real."

"I was [playing] against a lawyer and an ordained minister," he said.

With a degree in electrical and computer engineering from Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Currie hoped for lots of science categories. Unfortunately, those category names are often misleading.

When the category "Chemistry" came up, Currie eagerly selected it.

"I thought I would do well with chemistry, but it was chemistry in the relationship sense."

Although he finished in second place, the lieutenant stayed competitive throughout the game and even pulled

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ahead in Final Jeopardy if only for a moment. He came away from the experience a little wealthier, having won a six-day trip to Disney World and a little wiser too.

“Jeopardy is definitely easier playing at home,” the lieutenant said conclusively. “At home you can blurt out an answer even if it’s wrong. But when there is money on the line, you tend to be more hesitant.”

He also learned that persistence is the key to becoming a contestant.

“The champ I played against was invited three times to take the exam,” Currie said. “He failed the first two and made it the third time.”

So, can potential players expect to see Currie at the next tryout? Not likely.

“I don’t think I’ll be trying for any more shows,” he stated before hedging, “maybe in five years I’ll try Jeopardy again.” @